Sermón / Convención del Diócesis de la Republica Dominicana  
Campamento Monte de la Transfiguración, Jarabacoa  
Febrero 2012

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is a great joy to be here today with you in this blessed diocese. I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in the Diocese of East Carolina. I count it a great honor that your bishop asked me to preach.

My first visit to the Dominican Republic was in 1991. I was priest in a parish in the State of Rhode Island and my bishop asked me to represent him at an event in our Companion Diocese. That event was the consecration of the new bishop of the Dominican Republic - a person named Julio Holguin. What a wonderful experience it was. I fell in love with the Dominican Republic and its people and culture, and this energetic diocese. Over the years, I have come back to the Dominican Republic to lead mission trips and other journeys. In the twenty years since his consecration, your bishop has led this diocese with energy, vision and zeal for the Good News of Jesus. New congregations have been established, ministries expanded and the witness of The Episcopal Church has grown. Your bishop is a great and valued member of the House of Bishops and brings wisdom and insight to the House of Bishops -- and every once in a while, a good Dominican song! All of this is a cause for rejoicing and giving thanks to God for his abundance.

A year or so after his consecration, I invited Bishop Holguin to come to my parish in Rhode Island to preach. It was a very cold weekend in February when he arrived, and then it began to snow. I remember so well standing outside in the snow and cold with a few other people while your good bishop played in the snow while the rest of us froze!

Bishop Holguin's sermon on the Sunday of his visit was based on a verse from the First Letter of Peter (2:5): "...Like living stones, you are being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ..." It was a wonderful sermon and I remember it to this day. We are all followers of Jesus. Day by day, through our life and ministry, we are building God's kingdom. As God's people, we follow in Jesus' footsteps. In following Jesus, we leave footprints for others to follow.

Someone once observed that while we cannot see the Holy Spirit at work, we can see clearly the footprints of the Holy Spirit. Usually we see only dimly where the Spirit is leading us. But we can look back and see clearly where the Spirit has already been at work. What are some footprints of God's Holy Spirit? Baptism - being born into the Body of Christ...that is a footprint of the Spirit. Holy Eucharist - God feeding his people with the rich food of eternal life in the Body and Blood of his Son - that is a footprint of the Spirit. And there are many more footprints of God's spirit - where there is love God is there. Where there is justice, God is there. Where people are fed in the name of Jesus, where there is healing and forgiveness, God's Spirit is at work. And especially, where there is joy, and singing, there is a footprint of God's Spirit. I see so many footprints of God's Spirit in the life and mission of this blessed Diocese - In your vibrant worship, in the schools for children, in the Bishop Isaac Home for the elderly, in the health clinics, in the new congregations being established and churches built. In the lives of all the people gathered here today as leaders of this Diocese, gathered as living stones, looking
to strengthen its witness and mission. All of these are footprints of God’s Spirit at work in this Diocese and are reasons for thanksgiving to God.

God’s mission in this world is to leave his footprints everywhere. We see God’s footprints in the structures of our societies and in the life of nations when justice abounds and human dignity is protected. We see God’s footprints in the lives of God’s people when servanthood overcomes selfishness, when forgiveness outweighs judgment and where hope replaces despair. As many writers have noted, the Church does not have a mission; but because God has a mission, there is a Church. I rejoice that God’s people in this Diocese are leaving divine footprints everywhere - footprints of justice, and food and healing, footprints of education and worship and footprints of hope.

God’s people are on the move! Like the ancient Israelites, like St. Paul in his travels, God’s people are on the move. And where God’s people go, we leave footprints. Whenever God’s Church is on the march in fulfilling God’s mission, three things grow: First, community. God always brings together a community and promises to be with us always, for God never abandons! (Jesus says, "I am with you always...") As the living stones St. Peter speaks of, you and I are living stones in a spiritual house being built by God. And it is a house that houses a community of faith, a community of good works, and a community that will last forever. The second thing that grows as the Church fulfills God’s mission is conversation. A holy conversation that the Church begins with the world in which we live. It is a conversation that begins with the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus: You are loved! You are not alone! God is always with us, and with you! And the third thing that grows as the Church works in fulfilling God’s mission is compassion. That is why Jesus came to live and die and rise among us - because he saw our difficulties and had compassion on our suffering. Along with community and conversation, compassion for others is one of the footprints of the Holy Spirit at work.

I pray that the life of this Church and this Diocese is one large footprint of the Holy Spirit at work, and I know that it is. I pray that as others see God’s holy footprints in your lives and the life of this Church, many will see and follow you. And in following in your footsteps, they will also be following Jesus. In following Jesus, we are fed with heavenly food, we are forgiven through divine love, we are given hope through God’s promises, and one day we will receive God’s promise of eternal life.

Thanks be to God!
Amen.